



# Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers

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**President Nichole Coleman**  
**Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers**  
**HB 192**  
**House Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security**

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Craig, Representative Anielski, Representative Brown, Representative Fedor, Representative Landis, Representative Miller, Representative Perales, Representative Riedel, Representative Vitale, Representative Young and Representative Zeltwanger: My name is Nichole Coleman and I am a seven-year Air Force veteran who served in Desert Storm and I am also the wife of a 10-year Air Force veteran. I am a county veterans service officer and the director of the Hancock County Veterans Service Office and I am the president of the Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers.

There should never be a reason to specify which veterans take precedence over other veterans, and never a reason to add a non-veteran spouse to a VSC.

Our offices were established in 1886 to basically follow Abraham Lincoln's creed 'to care for him that has borne the battle, and his widow or orphan.' Veterans owe a special trust to our brothers and sisters in service, and their families. The only reason we can find for someone even suggesting the addition of a spouse is that at some point in time, a spouse felt somehow wronged by a VSC. If HB 192 is a response to such an issue, we suggest it is hugely disproportional! And many additional questions arise with HB 192.

Our first question is why? As stated above, what prompted such a movement in the first place? The second question, and possibly most importantly, is what happens if the spouse separates or divorces the veteran? Does the seat automatically become vacant? The changes as proposed do not answer these questions. How would the spouse be vetted? The other point we will continue to drive home is that ORC 5901.05 already provides a capacity for the spouses to serve. If there are counties where spouses want to be involved with the Veterans Service Commission they should get active with the Veterans Services Committee. If the specific county doesn't have an active Veterans Service Committee then work with the leadership in that community to get one activated. If we include spouses we are only watering down the representation of veterans on the VSC.

The requirements demanded by this proposal are also over burdensome. Each veteran organization in a county may submit a list of only one name to each position, where current law suggests a minimum of three names be submitted for obvious reasons. Each organization must be notified, and the appropriate judge must also provide public notice in newspapers and libraries. In some counties in Ohio, such as Harrison, this might not be a problem with only one post and one library (as a suggestion, not as a fact). However, this would mean only one name could be submitted by the post, which would be overly suggestive. In Lake County, there are at minimum twenty six (26) federally chartered veteran organizations, and I have no idea how many libraries. In this instance, it now possibly becomes an avalanche of name submissions! Of course, none of these submitted names, individually or on any list, need be appointed if "...the judge does not wish to appoint a person..." whose name was in any way submitted, as HB 192 is presently offered. With great respect, this offers the possibility of an over-assertion of control of VSCs.

**Ref: H.B. 192 Testimony from OSACVSO/OSAVSC**

Additionally, HB 192 repeals current RC §5901.02 but only changed three things, striking “section” and adding “sections” and “and 5901.022.” It didn’t change anything else. The proposed addition of §5901.022 otherwise doesn’t modify §5901.02, but it also does not place any of the current eligibility requirements for seating as a Veteran Service Commissioner on the suggested new seats! There is no requirement the veteran be honorably discharged, nor is there a requirement either the ‘new’ veteran or the spouse be residents of that county! Are the ‘new’ Commissioners required to receive the same training? We don’t know either; it isn’t mentioned in HB 192!

The Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers and the Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners have asked the sponsors to help us understand what problem they see would be solved by this bill: After several months of waiting for an answer, we are still unclear as to what their objectives are with HB 192.

I’ve stated reasons in opposition to the addition of a spouse, or any non-veteran to VSCs. Driving a new wedge between groups of veterans by adding one group over another is taking decade’s worth of progress backwards: Such distinctions should never again be made in America, and certainly not in Ohio!

As stated in the creed of the Vietnam Veterans of America, a “group” or “classification” of veterans that clearly and unquestionably had standing to bring claims of disfavor and distrust, ‘Never Again. Never Again Shall One Generation of Veterans be Abandoned by Another.’

Our OEF/OIF veterans are not only experiencing a period in our Nation’s history where the most benefits ever offered presently exists, but they are also well represented in our offices and on our VSCs. I might also note that on average at the young end of the spectrum, an OEF/OIF veteran could easily be in her or his mid-20’s or early 30’s, an age where most couldn’t serve on a VSC due to other commitments in their life.

Most notable are the present statistics concerning our VSCs. And these facts were apparently unknown by the Bill’s sponsors, suggesting even more problems with its introduction, or at least additional questions. The OSACVSO, however, compiled the following info: Twenty two percent (22%) of the County Veteran Service Commissioners served since 1990 (The beginning of the Gulf Wars, to include Iraq and Afghanistan), and 45% of the VSC’s employees served during that same period. This compares with statewide percentages of 29% of veterans in Ohio serving after 1990! Only 10% of Ohioans served since 9/11 (both these latter figures are from the Department of Veterans’ Affairs). Almost 47% of Ohio’s veterans served prior to 1975. We must ask, how then, are OEF/OIF veterans underrepresented? Presently they comprise almost one full seat statewide (considering 20% equal to one of the five seats) and comprise almost one half of the professionals presently serving Ohio’s veterans and their dependents! It is a well-known fact that Vietnam veterans are dying at a far younger age than their veteran siblings, and our WW II and Korean War veterans are realistically past their desire to serve in such positions, and comprise only 13% of Ohio’s veterans. I respectfully suggest that each January going forward, starting January 2018, when the present selections to the VSCs commence, it will include fewer WW II and Korea veterans, and more ‘modern era’ veterans, numbers that will trend up exponentially the years ahead. The VSC percentage is already up three (3%) percent since last year.

This proposed bill does a disservice to our veterans’ organizations and our fellow veterans. The veterans who serve in the veterans service organizations the ORC 5901 lists for the common pleas judges to appoint from demonstrate their sincere interest in serving veterans in their community by giving their time and leadership skills in that organization. The veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraq Freedom can join the organizations. Without that process how are the judges supposed to find the veterans for interviewing and appointing? If the reason for this bill is someone felt there was a lack of quality applicants to choose from in a

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specific county then the appointing judges have the authority to choose from any veteran they feel is qualified and meets the requirements of the code. If there is a county where that is a problem then we believe it would be better use of time and resources to speak with the authorities in that county rather than adding more bureaucracy.

This Bill is three decades too late, and presently unnecessary; it should be defeated.

## Notes:

- Our definition of 'modern era' is serving since August of 1990
- 88 Counties X 5 CVSC = 440 Total CVSC
- 83 of the 440 CVSC served in the military after August 1990.  $95/440 = 22\%$
- 242 of the 537 members of the staff served in the military after August 1990.  $242/537 = 45\%$
- Total number serving in the modern era 95 CVSC + 242 Staff = 337.
- Total Number serving in theater during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom, or who served subsequently in those theaters of operation 44 CVSC + 100 Staff = 144
- Of those who served in the modern era ( $144/325 = 44\%$ ) 44% have served in theater